DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 324 CG 021 900

AUTHOR DeVault, Christine
TITLE Too Soon for Sex? Title No. 501.
SPONS AGENCY Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Menlo Park, CA.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-941816-76-1
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 131p.; For related documents, see CG 021 898-901.
AVAILABLE FROM Network Publications, 1700 Mission St., Suite 203, P.O. Box 1830, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1830 ($3.95).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Decision Making; Moral Issues; Moral Values; Peer Acceptance; Pregnancy; Reader Text Relationship; Secondary Education; *Sex Education; *Sexuality; Simulation; Story Reading
IDENTIFIERS *Abstinence; *Interactive Fiction

ABSTRACT

This story, one of three in The Sexuality Decision-Making Series for Teens, contains several different possible plot lines depending on the decisions the reader makes for the characters at various "choice points." The story focuses on the theme of abstinence: Serena and James are in love and need to face the realities of their sexual feelings for each other. The story follows this teenage couple through a series of decisions, each of which affects whether or not they have sex and how they manage their lives. There is also a teenage mother in the story--Serena's friend, Shawna. The story models the following communication skills: how to bring up the subject of sex with a partner before being put in a "compromising position"; how to say no to pressure to have sex even in a situation that has gone pretty far; how to bring up the subject of sex and talk to parents about it; and how to express one's own values positively without losing friends or appearing too "square."(TE)

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...tine DeVault

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do? It's up
to you.

Too Soon for Sex?

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Christine DeVault

Illustrated by Ian Akin

Network Publications
a division of ETR Associates
Santa Cruz, CA
1989

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover design: Julia Chiapella
Illustrations: Ian Akin

Title No. 501

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

DeVault, Christine.
Too soon for sex? / Christine DeVault
p. cm.
Summary: The reader makes decisions for Serena and James as they struggle with question of whether to have sex or to wait.
1. Plot-your-own-stories. [1. Sexual ethics—Fiction. 2. Plot-your-own stories.] I. Title
P27.D496To 1989
[Fic]—dc 20 89-3306
CIP
AC

ISBN 0-941816-76-1

This book was made possible by a grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Walter S. Johnson Foundation.

The Sexuality Decision-Making Series for Teens

by Christine DeVault

Too Soon for Sex?
Abstinence

Taking Chances with Sex
Birth Control

Don't Let It Get Around
Sexually Transmitted Disease

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Publisher's Note

Some of the material in this publication is controversial, due to the nature of the subject matter covered. This book was developed with the specific intent of influencing adolescent sexual behaviors. Therefore, it may be most appropriate for use in communities in which there are high rates of teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease or substance use. In addition, the laws related to teaching sensitive topics in the classroom vary throughout the country and will have an effect on what may be taught and how it is presented. We recommend that teachers understand district policies and state mandates and obtain parental, school board and administrative support before using the material.

Too Soon For Sex? is a story in which you get to make choices for the characters.

It works like this:

You meet Serena and James. They are in love and trying to decide if they are ready for sexual intimacy. Their struggle with this decision presents them with a series of choices. Each time they have to make a choice, you step in and make it for them.

Your choice takes you to a different part of the book, where you'll discover the outcome of your decision. You continue to make choices as you read, until you reach the end. When you finish, go back and make different choices. There are many stories in the same book.

You become part of this story as you make choices for Serena and James.

1

"So tell me," said Serena, pulling back from James' embrace and looking into his eyes, "just exactly how far did you and...um, Angela go?"

It was a rainy Saturday afternoon in November. Serena and James were settled in the glow of the fireplace in her living room. Her parents weren't home.

James looked pained. "That was a long time ago. It doesn't have anything to do with us."

"Well, I think it does in a way," said Serena. She sighed and sat up, straightening her sweater and smoothing back her curly dark hair. "It would help if I knew what you expected of me."

"Serena! I don't expect you to be like Angela. That was an entirely different situation."

"Different how, James? Because you went all the way with her? You did, didn't you?"

James stared into the fire. "Yeah."

2

"I knew it," Serena said. She was surprised to feel tears beginning to gather in her eyes. Be reasonable, she told herself. It happened a year ago, before you even knew him. Why are you so bothered by it now?

James glanced over at her just as the tears spilled down her cheeks. "Aw, babe, c'mon. It's no big deal." He reached over to touch her shoulder.

Serena went to the sink and splashed cool water on her face. She dried off with a paper towel and then took several deep breaths. I've got to get control of myself, she thought. I get upset so easily lately and I don't even understand why.

James came in then and stood behind her. He massaged her shoulders. "You okay? I didn't mean to upset you."

Serena leaned against him. "Yeah, I know. But like I said—I guess I need some time to figure things out. Sometimes it seems we're so busy we don't even have time to think. We have school, I have gymnastics, you have basketball and your music. We haven't even had much time together lately. Then when we finally get an opportunity to just be alone, I blow it."

"Hey," said James, turning Serena around to face him, "you didn't blow it. It's okay to have whatever feelings you have. But you've got to

believe me, what happened between Angela and me really doesn't have anything to do with us. I didn't love Angela; I love you."

If you really love me, Serena thought, how come you don't even want to make love with me? But all she said was "I love you, too."

"The rain's let up some. I guess I'd better go," James said glancing out the window. "We've got to practice some before the gig tonight. I'll call you tomorrow." He smiled down at her and kissed her cheek. They held each other for a few moments and then he was gone.

Serena stood at the window, watching as James made the dash to his car through the chilling drizzle. She smiled. I love the way he moves, she thought. He's so fine looking. Sometimes it still amazed her that she and James were together. She remembered how surprised she'd been when James first asked her out.

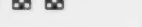
The previous year, when she was a sophomore and James a junior, they had been in the same geometry class. She'd let him copy her homework a few times but never expected their relationship would develop beyond that point. James was maybe the best looking guy at Rosemont High. He was also one of the most popular. His good humor and easygoing attitude won him many friends among boys and girls alike.

4

James had a serious side too. He took on a lot of responsibility at an early age. His parents had divorced when he was ten years old and his mother had moved away, taking his baby sister. Henry Pryce, James' father, was an alcoholic and had been unable to keep a steady job or manage the household. So James and his older sister Charlene had to keep things together as best they could until their father had the near-fatal car accident that turned his life around.

For five years now, Henry Pryce had been sober, and he had earned the respect of the community both as a businessman and as a fundraiser for charitable causes. Charlene was away at college and James and his father lived comfortably and quietly together.

I could just stare at him for hours, Serena thought, watching the car pull away from the curb. She wondered why James, who could probably have any girl at Rosemont, had chosen her.



James, on the other hand, had no doubts as to why he loved Serena. As he drove carefully though the slick suburban streets, he thought about the first time he really noticed her. He and his friend Mark had gone to one of Rosemont's

She remembered how surprised she'd been when James first asked her out.

gymnastics meets the previous winter. It had been an exciting event with numerous skilled performances. But more than any other participant, the slender, dark girl on the balance beam had captured the crowd's attention and won their hearts—one heart especially. James remembered the hushed expectation of the audience as Serena flawlessly executed her routine with the precision, strength, and poise that he now knew were reflected in many aspects of her life.

At first James had been a little in awe of Serena—she was an outstanding student and a superb gymnast; she had many loyal friends and a family that seemed ideal. Serena's parents, Denise and Donald Williams, adored their only child and devoted a good deal of energy to shaping her life and future. Dance, gymnastics, piano, choir and art lessons had all played their parts in Serena's life. But school was always the most important. The Williamses were determined that Serena would attend a prestigious university and have a brilliant career.

Her father, an attorney, hoped that Serena would choose to go into law. Her mother, who had a degree in psychology, saw her daughter following in her footsteps or perhaps going into education or medicine.

Serena herself hadn't thought much about it.

She worked equally hard in all her classes and almost always brought home A's. Usually she didn't really know if she enjoyed the schoolwork or not. She did enjoy the praise from her parents and the admiration of her teachers and fellow students.

James smiled to himself as he waited for the red light to change. He and Serena had done a lot of growing together. They had shed a few tears and shared a lot of laughter. Serena had gotten better at expressing herself; now she wasn't so afraid to show her feelings or talk about things that were bothering her, although some things were still rather difficult to discuss.

There's something bothering her now all right, James thought. Sooner or later I guess we'll have to deal with the sex issue. It would have to be later he decided. It was easier for him to keep Serena and sex in two different compartments of his mind. Sex was for fantasies and dreams, when he was by himself. James sighed as he pulled into the driveway. I've got to admit that ol' Serena is sneaking into those dreams more and more, he thought.

After James left, Serena went into her room and changed into leotard, tights, and sweatshirt. She went into the family room and methodically went thought a stretching routine. Then, select-

ing a cassette with a driving beat, she climbed onto her stationary exercise bicycle. Adjusting her headphones, she said out loud, "Okay, how about a little ten-mile trip?"

Usually, Serena started her workouts slowly and gradually worked up to her maximum capacity. This time she started out pedaling hard.

For a while she didn't think about anything. She let her mind be carried by the pulsing music and focused only the minimum attention needed on her breathing and her pumping legs. She was aware of perspiration trickling down her face and body and she slowed long enough to toss off her sweatshirt and readjust the headphones. She looked at the bike's mileage gauge. "Good, three miles." But she was already beginning to tire. "That's what I get for starting off too fast. Time to slow down," she muttered.

As Serena settled into a more moderate pace, she found her thoughts focusing on her favorite subject. James was mostly what she thought about, if she wasn't doing school work or concentrating on gymnastics. She sighed. James was the source of so much happiness for her, but lately their relationship was also becoming a source of confusion and pain. "Sex," she said out loud. She felt an extra warmth rise to her cheeks. That's what it is, she thought, I might as well face it. I

can't seem to stop thinking about what sex with James would be like. I don't really even want to think about it now—there's so much going on in my life. But when we're together it feels so wonderful....

Serena thought about her conversations with her friends. Tracy had told her that sex wasn't nearly as great as it was cracked up to be. "I guess it would be worth it if you really liked the guy," she'd said. Makes it sound like some kind of punishment, Serena thought.

Serena's friend Christy, on the other hand, seemed to feel differently. "Oh, Serena, he makes me feel so good." Christy and her boyfriend hadn't gone all the way as far as Serena knew but they had gone pretty far. She's done more than I have, thought Serena, and she hasn't even been going with him as long as I have with James. Maybe there's something wrong with me.

Serena's body was starting to object to what it was being put through. Her legs were heavy and she was breathing hard. Still two miles to go, she thought. She turned up the volume on the cassette player. She thought about her friend Shawna. Shawna, the good-time girl, always the life of the party. I guess she was the life of one too many parties, Serena thought. Shawna hadn't come back to school this year, her junior year,

because she was at home with her mother and her baby daughter. The baby was beautiful, to be sure, but Shawna's life was a mess. I really should go visit her, Serena thought guiltily. She remembered how lonely Shawna had seemed when she'd last seen her.

The beeper went off on the bike, signaling the completion of Serena's ten-mile stint. She took off her headphones as she slid off the bicycle seat. She wiped her face with a towel and, slinging it over her shoulder, headed for the shower.

Later on, Serena took her history book into the living room. She put another log in the fireplace and pushed it around with the poker, turned on the reading light next to the sofa, and settled down. After three pages she found it difficult to concentrate. She put down the book, stretched out, and closed her eyes. She remembered being there in front of the fire with James. She recalled how it felt to have her arms around him and his around her. She could recapture his smell, the warmth of his skin, the touch of his lips.... She fell asleep and didn't awaken until her parents came home.

"If it isn't Sleeping Beauty," said her father fondly. Serena got up and helped fix dinner. She was quiet throughout the meal. Her father looked concerned. "Something bothering you, princess? Did you and James have a falling out?"

"No, Dad, nothing like that. I just can't seem to think of anything to say."

Serena and her mother cleared the table while her dad started the dishes. "Serena," her mom said, "if there's anything bothering you, I wish you'd tell me."

"It's okay, Mom. I guess I'm just kind of tired," she answered. But later on, as she got ready for bed, Serena thought about talking to her mother. Maybe she could help me figure out what to do, she thought. But it's so embarrassing. How do you bring up the topic of sex with your mother?

I'll decide tomorrow, she told herself, as she fell asleep.

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 1A

If you think Serena decided **to talk** to her mother about sex

turn to page 12.

Choice Point 1B

If you think Serena decided **not to talk** to her mother

turn to page 19.

continued from p. 11

"Mom? Are you busy?"

Serena's mother looked up from her desk. She had various newspaper clippings, scraps of paper and an open telephone directory spread out in front of her. She smiled up at her daughter. "Well, yes, actually. I'm putting together a list of businesses to contact for contributions for the shelter's Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners."

Denise Williams was always involved in some kind of community project. Right now she was helping run a shelter for homeless people. She spent hours talking on the telephone and writing letters, trying to get support for the project. She worked at the shelter one day each week helping people get what they needed—jobs, childcare, medical help, counseling or just a decent pair of shoes.

Even though Serena greatly admired her mother for her dedication, she felt a twinge of resentment as she stood there. What about me? she thought.

Her mother sensed her mood. "Hey, sweetheart, you know I've always got time for you. What is it?" She got up and went to the sofa, motioning for Serena to sit down beside her.

Serena had planned what she would say. She

had decided to adopt her best adult, matter-of-fact, this-is-no-big-deal manner. Just ask the questions and get the answers. Just the facts, ma'am, she said to herself, but when she opened her mouth, no words came out. She felt a lump rise in her throat, her nose began to prickle and tears spilled out of her eyes.

Suddenly, her mother looked very concerned, even frightened. "Serena, what is it, honey?" she demanded. "Did something happen? Is there a problem?"

Serena began to giggle between sobs. "It's okay, Mom...don't worry (sniff). Don't look so scared.... Nothing's happened, Mom, really (chuckle). In fact, that's sort of the problem."

Serena's mother's look of alarm was replaced by one of confusion. "Is it something about James?"

Serena nodded. "I don't know exactly what to say, Mom. I had it all planned out and now it just seems stupid. I feel like a little kid."

"Ah, I think I get it," her mom said. "This is about sex, right?"

Serena nodded again. "I can't believe myself. I'm even afraid to say it....Yes, it's about sex." She took a deep breath. "What I want to know is, how do you know when it's the right time? I mean if you love somebody sooner or later it's

"What I want to know is, how do you know when it's the right time?"

going to happen, right?"

"Is James pressuring you to have sex?"

"Oh no, not at all. Sometimes...uh, sometimes I get the feeling that he'd like to...." She felt her face growing hot. "But he...um...stops things before they get too far. I mean he stops things before I would sometimes. I've started thinking about what it would be like, but I'm scared, and I don't know what's going on with him."

"Have you talked with him about this?"

"Uh...no...not really. It's kind of embarrassing."

"It takes a lot of courage for all of us to talk about these things. But it's almost always worth it."

"Yeah, I guess. At least I can talk to my friends—like Tracy and Christy. Only the problem with that is they seem to know a lot more than I do."

"Do you feel like they're pressuring you?"

"Oh, no. My friends aren't like that. Some people are—but not my true friends. It's just that I know they know something I don't know. I feel like an outsider."

"Well, I guess there are a lot of reasons people choose to have sex, but do you think that 'going along with the crowd' is enough of a reason where something so important is concerned?"

"No, I don't. But James and I really love each other, Mom."

Her mother nodded. "Your dad and I have talked about this, you know. As you can probably guess, he can't cope very well with the idea of your being sexually involved. I guess I'm pretty old-fashioned too, hon. I really don't think you should be having sex until you're quite a bit older. Certainly not in high school."

"But you don't really think people have to be married, do you?"

"Well...."

"What about you, Mom? Were you a virgin when you married Daddy?"

Serena's mother thought for a moment. "This is hard for me, Serena. I don't know if it's really an appropriate thing for me to talk about, but on the other hand, I want to be honest with you. No, I wasn't a virgin when I married your father, although I was when I met him." She smiled as she recalled the past. "You know how straight-laced my folks are. I was so naive. As it was I went with Donald for a long time before anything...before we started getting sexually involved. Now I'm not saying that it was right for us to have sex before we were married, Serena. But we did love each other and we knew we would be married soon. And we were considera-

bly older than you and James are."

Serena thought this over. "What about Daddy? Was he...um...did he...?"

"Let's just say he was more experienced than I was, and leave it at that.... I guess what I want you to know is I really want you to come to me if you decide to start having sex. I need to know if you're using protection. It would be hard for me, Serena, because I don't think it's a good decision, but I don't want to put my head in the sand. It would be so much harder if you got in some kind of trouble—you know—like Shawna."

"Or if I got some awful disease," added Serena.

"That's one more frightening thing," her mother said. "Although I suppose you're not too likely to catch something like AIDS."

"That's another thing, Mom," Serena said. "One of the things we learned in that health class was that you don't have to be gay to get AIDS. Just 'cause a lot of heterosexuals haven't got it yet doesn't mean they can't get it. In that class, they said that teenagers have to be just as careful as adults—like use condoms."

"All the more reason, Serena," her mom said, "to wait until you're older and have found someone you want to be with for the rest of your life."

Serena was quiet for a while. "I really think

I've found him," she said softly. "That's what makes it hard."

Serena's mother patted her knee. "Maybe you have found him, sweetheart. He's a fine boy. He'll be a fine man. But the fact is you're both young. You have your whole lives ahead of you and this is the time to be laying the foundation for the future. Seems to me sex for someone your age is just one more thing to worry about."

"I'm already worrying about it," Serena moaned, "and I haven't even done it."

Turn to page 29.

continued from p. 11

The following week, Serena and her friend Tracy Carter walked home together after gymnastics practice.

"Tom Johnson's been bugging me again," Tracy remarked casually, shifting her backpack to her other shoulder.

Serena gave her friend a sidelong glance. "Bugging you, huh? That's too bad, Trace. He's only about the cutest guy in eleventh."

"Yeah, well, there is that." Tracy allowed herself a brief smile. "He's nice, smart, funny, a great football player...."

"You don't seem too thrilled. How come?"

Tracy sighed. "Oh, I don't know. I guess I just don't want to get involved right now."

"You still feeling bad about Vincent?"

Tracy was silent for a while. She kicked at the leaves that lay along the sidewalk. "I s'pose I am, sort of.... It's not that I still like him or anything...but it was just so hard when we split up." She shook her head. "I don't ever want to go through that again."

"Well," said Serena brightly, "you wouldn't necessarily have to go through the same things. Every relationship is different."

"Girl, you are living in a dream world," Tracy

said. "I mean I really hope you and James are different, but from what I've seen it's like 'everything comes to an end.' Everything!"

Serena thought about this. She tried to imagine what it would be like without James. It was too horrible even to think about. She wondered if Tracy had felt the same way about Vincent. "I guess you really must've loved him a lot," she said.

"I thought I did. I don't really know anymore. Maybe it was infatuation—or maybe it was just lust. It happened so fast—I didn't even get to know him very well. It was like—one minute you're as close as two people could possibly be and the next minute—nothing."

"So are you sorry you went all the way with him?" Serena asked casually, although she was dying to know.

Tracy shrugged. "I don't know. Sometimes it felt good to be so close to someone, to be loved. Of course, then it turned out I was just kidding myself and he didn't really love me. Plus what if I'd gotten pregnant?"

"You mean you didn't use anything?" Serena asked unbelievingly. "We had health class together, Trace! I know you know the facts of life. How could you be so...so...?"

"So stupid? I don't know, actually. I can't

believe how lucky I was. I wanted to use something but Vince thought it wasn't romantic. Can you believe that? As if getting pregnant would be romantic. Or getting some disease would be romantic. It makes me sick. You know he's doing it with Jill now, and before that it was Kim—that's when we split up—and before me there were a bunch of others. He could be passing all kinds of stuff around."

"Yuck," was all Serena could say.

"So, to answer your question...I guess I'd have to say yes, I'm kind of sorry. But I don't think you should use me as an example. I mean James is different and you two have a super relationship. Everyone has to make up their own mind."

"Yeah. Thanks....That makes everything real clear," she added sarcastically.

"So you could always take a poll," Tracy suggested. "We'll pass out questionnaires: 'Should Serena and James do IT?' And then you can just do whatever the majority says."

"Very funny," said Serena.

During the next couple of weeks, Serena and James didn't have much chance to see each other. They had homework and basketball and gymnastics practice. James had to practice guitar with his band and Serena had family commitments. On Thanksgiving she helped her mother at the

homeless shelter and then went to the family dinner at her grandparents' house.

The following night, James picked Serena up to go to the movies. Serena bravely waited as her father gave his usual parting remarks. "Take good care of our girl now, young man. We're counting on you."

Serena and James had a lot to catch up on so they decided to skip the movies and go for a drive instead. They drove for a while, then decided to stop in the quiet parking lot of the city park.

"I've been missing you so much," said Serena.

"Me too," James replied leaning toward her.

As they kissed, she put her arms around his neck. She was very aware of his breathing and the pounding of her own heart. She tried to move closer, but the gear shift seemed to have other ideas.

Oh Serena, thought James. What am I gonna do with you? Part of him desperately wanted to get closer to her, to hold her, and kiss her and not hold back anything anymore. It was becoming more and more difficult for him to stop and cool off once they had started making out. The other part of James wanted to do what he felt was right, not just what felt good. I don't even know what Serena expects, he thought. It really can't go on

like this. We have to talk about it.

"Serena," he whispered, "sometimes...sometimes I...."

"What is it, James?"

"I just hope you know how much I love you—the way you look, the way you feel...everything. But I think...maybe—"

"James, do you s'pose we could get in the back seat to talk? This seat is really uncomfortable."

She's not gonna understand, he thought. She'll probably feel rejected. Besides, she's so fine.... Well, I'd better speak up now if I'm going to, he said to himself.

What did James do?

Choice Point 2A

If you think James decided **to talk** to Serena about sex

turn to page 28.

Choice Point 2B

If you think James decided **not to talk** but to continue making out

turn to page 24.

continued from p.23

James hesitated another moment, then he reached across Serena to open her door. He got out on his side and they both got into the back seat.

"This is much better," Serena said. She slipped her arms around his neck. "You were saying...?"

His mouth covered hers. It had been a long time since Serena and James had allowed themselves to follow their feelings without regard for the possible consequences. Now the closeness and the physical pleasure of touching each other seemed to overpower every other thought, wish, or expectation.

It feels like fireworks, Serena thought, like all those silly things you read about. Like bells... or...like...a fire alarm!

James felt Serena's body tense. "What is it?" he asked.

Now you've done it! Serena thought to herself. How're you going to get out of this one? You don't even want to get out now, do you? Maybe this is *it*, she thought. She wondered if James had any condoms. You jerk, said another voice inside her head. Are you really ready for this? How will you feel about yourself? about James? Who cares? the first voice said.

"Rena?" said James. "Are you still with me?"

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 3A

If you think Serena
told James she didn't want
to go any further

turn to page 42.

Choice Point 3B

If you think Serena
didn't say anything

turn to page 26.

continued from p. 25

She nodded, reaching out to touch James' face.

Oh man, he thought. His heart was racing as if it would leap out of his chest. He looked at Serena in the dim light. She looked so beautiful, so desirable, so...available. Yet something had made her hesitate just a bit and in that split second James realized what was happening, what was about to happen. I don't think she's going to stop me, he thought. He wondered what she'd think if he took out a condom. This is crazy, man, he told himself. Remember what you promised. This just is not the time. She's not ready. Heck, you're not ready. It's just too important.

"James?" Serena's hands were cool against his burning skin. "I love you."

She loves me, he thought. She loves me, she wants me. Why am I being so uptight?

He leaned toward her again. But as they kissed this time, he was thinking: "Now what?"

What did James do?

Choice Point 4A

If you think James decided to **stop making out** with Serena

turn to page 45.

Choice Point 4B

If you think James decided to **continue making out** with Serena and possibly go all the way

turn to page 53.

continued from p. 23

"Babe," said James, grasping Serena's hand and kissing her fingertips, "we've got to talk."

Serena pulled back. "What's wrong?"

"It's okay, Rena, believe me." James smiled and stroked her hair. "I just love you too much to let this go by. It's nothing bad. Don't look so scared."

"You got so serious all of a sudden. What is it?"

"Uh...well...it's kind of hard for me to think exactly how to put this. I've been going around and around about it and...."

"About what, James? What?"

"About what we're doing, Serena. I think we should really talk about what we're gonna do, how far we're gonna go. It's crazy to wait until the last minute."

"Oh." Serena sat back. "This is about the s-word, huh?" She smiled slightly.

James laughed. "Yeah, I guess it is." He leaned back and stared out the window. "So what do you think? What are we going to do?"

Turn to page 37.

continued from p. 18

The following week, Serena decided to stop by her friend Shawna's house after school. She knocked at the door of the small house where Shawna lived with her baby daughter and her mother.

"Serena! Come in! This is great!" Shawna hugged her and pulled her into the house. "S'cuse the mess. I try to get things straightened up when Mom's at work but sometimes it's hard to get around to it." She moved to the TV and turned down the volume. "I've been watching the soaps," she said apologetically. "It's the only excitement I get anymore."

"So how's Ashley doing? Where is she?"

"I just got her down for her nap. She's teething and she's been real cranky. But she's doing great. She's beautiful."

"Can I take a peek at her?"

"Sure, but let's wait a few minutes, okay? To be sure she's sleeping soundly. You want some coffee or a soda or something?"

"No thanks. I can't stay long. But I've been thinking about you and wanted to know how you were doing." She doesn't look so good, Serena thought, noting Shawna's stringy hair, her shapeless blouse and the dark lines under her eyes.

"It's nice to see you. I don't see too many of the people from school anymore. I don't see too many people from anywhere, actually." She flopped onto the sofa. Pushing newspapers and magazines out of the way, she motioned to Serena. "C'mon, sit down and fill me in on the latest gossip. How're you and James doing?"

"Well, we have our moments, but we're doing pretty well."

"How about Christy? I haven't seen her in ages."

"You're not the only one. I hardly ever see her since she and David Velásquez discovered each other. They practically live together."

"That's far out. I wouldn't have thought of them as a couple, but I can see how they'd like each other—kind of like 'opposites attract.' She's so bouncy and energetic and he's so quiet and...I don't know...he seems kind of wise or something."

"Probably 'cause he wears glasses."

Shawna laughed.

"But I know what you mean. Anyway, that's what's happening with Christy. Let me see. Now Tracy is another story. Tracy is trying to stay single, but Tom Johnson's trying to make his moves on her."

"Tom's a fox."

"Yeah, but she's still torn up over what happened with Vincent. He was really cold to her, you know. She thought he loved her."

"Tell me about it," Shawna said. "I've been there."

"Have you seen Duane lately?"

"Duane who? Sorry, but as you can see, I'm not thrilled about him. He hasn't even been over to see Ashley in three months."

"It's probably just as well, Shawna. I mean, he's probably not ever going to be someone you can count on."

"Yeah, that's what my mom says. Still, Ashley is his daughter.... Anyway, tell me what you think about Josh Keller."

"Josh? Well, I've know him for about ten years. He's sort of like a brother to me—a bratty brother sometimes, I must admit. I guess he's seeing Melissa a lot now."

"Yeah. That's why I asked. Melissa's about the only good friend I have—except for you—and I've been kind of worried about her."

"Why? 'Cause of Josh? He's a good guy. I don't think he'd hurt her on purpose."

"Maybe not. But I get the feeling she likes him a lot more than he likes her. I just don't want to see her get hurt."

"Gosh, I don't know. I didn't know she was

super serious about him. Josh is kind of...not exactly wild...but I can't see him getting really serious about anyone. I can talk to him and tell him to cool it if you think it'll help."

"I don't know. If it got back to Melissa, she'd kill me. Maybe I'll talk to her about it again... try and get her to listen to reason." She gave a short bitter laugh. "Not that it would've worked with me."

"Not to change the subject," Serena said, "but do you think you'll be coming back to school soon?"

Shawna looked down at her hands. "Look at my nails. Remember I used to have real long ones? I painted 'em purple sometimes and black ...even green. Now I just bite 'em—that's my manicure."

Serena waited.

"I don't know about school. I'd like to but I'm almost two semesters behind already. I'd feel so out of it. Plus I can't afford baby sitting for Ashley. I don't really like the idea of leaving her with a stranger anyway. Maybe I can go to night school when she's a little older. Anyway my mom's been bugging me. She says either go back to school or get a job. So in a couple of months I'll have to do something, I guess. I just don't know what."

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"Oh Shawna, I really hope you can find a way to come back to school. It's so important. Besides it's not the same without you."

Shawna looked around at the disheveled living room. Twin tears made their way down her cheeks. "Yeah. Thanks."

She got up and blew her nose. "C'mon and take a look at my kid. Tell me if she isn't the cutest baby you ever saw."

"She's adorable," Serena whispered, looking down at the sleeping child. She really is, she thought, but what a terrible price Shawna's had to pay.

During the next couple of weeks, Serena and James didn't have much opportunity to see each other. They had homework and basketball and gymnastics practice. James had to practice guitar with his band and Serena had family commitments. On Thanksgiving she helped her mother at the homeless shelter and then went to the family dinner at her grandparents' house.

The following night, James picked Serena up to go to the movies. Serena bravely waited as her father gave his usual parting lecture: "Take good care of our girl now, young man. We're counting

"She's adorable," Serena whispered, looking down at the sleeping child.

on you."

Serena and James had a lot to catch up on so they decided to skip the movies and go for a drive instead. They drove for a while, then decided to stop in the quiet parking lot of the city park.

"I've been missing you so much," said Serena.

"Me too." James leaned toward her.

They kissed for a moment and then Serena pulled away. She looked seriously at James. "I love you," she said.

"I love you too, babe. Is something wrong?"

Well, she thought, this is it. Do or die. Open your mouth and talk, girl.

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 5A

If you think Serena decided **to talk** to James about sex and their relationship

turn to page 36.

Choice Point 5B

If you think Serena decided **not to talk** to James

turn to page 56.

continued from p. 35

"We have to talk, James," Serena burst out. "About our relationship. About our expectations. About the future." She felt her face growing hot. "If there is a future. I mean…I don't exactly know what you want. Well, I do sort of, but there are some things we've never talked about."

James looked concerned. "Sure there's a future. If you want it, of course there is. What made you think there wasn't? Did I do something?"

"Oh no, nothing like that. It's just…well…if we're going to be together, then it seems like sooner or later we're going to have to talk about making love…about sex." There, I said it, she thought, watching closely for his response.

There was a brief silence. "Oh…. Yeah, well…."

"I mean I think we should talk about it…before it just sort of happens. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yeah." James nodded slowly. "Yeah, we need to talk. What do you think we should do?"

Turn to the next page.

continued from p. 28 or 36

Serena drew her feet up onto the seat in front of her and hugged her knees. "I don't know. I'm pretty confused."

"You're not the only one. It's real hard to hold back sometimes when I'm with you, you know?"

"Really? I thought you had everything under perfect control." She tried to say this lightly, but she felt an angry edge in her voice.

"Are you kidding? If you only knew."

"Tell me. Then I'll know."

"Okay, okay, I'll tell you." He took a deep breath. "Sometimes, Serena, I want you so much it hurts. It hurts all over. It hurts my bones, it hurts my head.... You say you think I have everything under control. Well, I'll tell you I must put on a good show, 'cause that's sure not the way it is."

"Wow," said Serena. She swallowed hard. "I guess that's the good news and the bad news."

"What do you mean?"

"Good, 'cause I feel the same way and it's wonderful to hear you say it. Bad 'cause it doesn't help us make a decision. What are we going to do?"

James leaned over and put his arms around her. "I don't know. I never cared about anyone

so much, so it wasn't so important. No matter what happens, I always want to do the right thing by you."

"I know. That's part of why I love you so much. I want to do whatever will help us stay together."

After a while, James said, "I think we should plan then. How about if we sit down and really make up a plan—write down our ideas about what we want, where we want to be, you know, like in the future. Then we can compare notes."

"We did something like that in health class," Serena said. "We put what we wanted to be doing in one year, five years, ten years, like that. We put down stuff about school, career, family, where we wanted to live—"

The flash of headlights coming into the parking lot interrupted the conversation.

"Who the heck is that?" James grumbled as the car pulled alongside theirs.

"I don't believe it.... It's Christy and David, and Christy's driving!" Serena opened the door and ran toward the other car.

Then Christy jumped out yelling, "I got it! I got my license!"

Serena hugged her friend. "It's cold out here. Why don't you guys get in our car?"

Christy turned to tell David what was happen-

ing, and Serena slipped back into the car. "I hope it's okay. I invited them to get in with us."

"Yeah, I guess," said James.

Serena leaned over and hugged him. "I love you," she said as Christy and David clambered into the back seat.

David looked a little embarrassed. "I hope this is okay," he said.

"We're not interrupting anything, are we?" Christy demanded. She answered her own question. "No, they're in the front seat—how could we be?"

"Ha, ha," said Serena.

"Seriously," said Christy "you guys should take advantage of this back seat. David's mom's car is so small it's totally useless except to drive around in."

"This woman is crazed," said David. "I'm gonna have to take her to the vet or something."

"Chris," Serena said, "stop molesting David and tell me about your driver's test. Were you scared?"

"Totally. I was so freaked I couldn't remember which was right and which was left. The woman who was testing me told me to get in the left lane and I got in the right lane. She said, 'I said left' and I said, 'This is left.' Can you believe it? So anyway she was completely cool.

She said to pull over and then she just talked to me for a minute and told me to calm down. So then it was fine after that."

The friends shared their experiences of getting their driver's licenses. Then they decided to go for hamburgers.

Later, James drove Serena home. "How're you feeling now?" she asked as they pulled up.

"Good. Pretty good. I'm really glad we talked."

"Me too. So...uh...when shall we get together and talk about our...uh...plans?"

"About our future? Go ahead, you can say it. How about Sunday afternoon? I'll call you."

"Okay. You want to come in?"

"No, it's pretty late. I'll walk you to the door."

At the door, Serena slipped her arms around James' neck. "I love you so much. I love the idea of a future with you."

They kissed and held each other tightly. "Love you, babe," James whispered. He jogged back to the car and Serena went into the house.

On Sunday afternoon James went over to Serena's as planned. As he lifted his hand to knock at the door, it opened and Serena stood there smiling. "I heard you drive up. Come on in."

James bent to kiss her cheek and followed her into the house. "I hope you're ready to do some serious writing," he said with a grin.

"I've been warming up my writing arm. Wanna feel my muscle?" She flexed her bicep.

"Impressive," he said. "Let's get started."

Turn to page 89.

continued from p. 25

Serena struggled to sit upright.

"What's the matter?" James asked.

"I'm sorry. This is just too much for me." She started to cry.

"Shh." James stroked her hair. "It's all right."

"I'm just so scared, James. I want things to be right with us, I want you to respect me, I want to respect myself." Her voice broke. "But I love you so much. I want to show you I love you. I'm scared of losing you, I'm scared of getting pregnant, and I'm scared of feeling like this."

James handed Serena a tissue. "It's okay, really. I know what you mean. I'm sorry I let things go so far."

"Don't be sorry. I liked it a lot." She smiled through her tears and blew her nose.

"Me too," said James. "A whole lot." He rubbed her neck. "One thing you always have to remember—I will always respect you, no matter what. We've got to work this out though. I feel like I'm on a roller coaster."

"Yeah."

"So what do you think. Do you think we should...uh...?"

"Should what?" she giggled. "You can do it, but you can't say it, huh?"

James shook his head and smiled ruefully. "You got me there. Okay, here it is, Serena: I would love to make love with you. If we agreed it was the right thing and if we could be sure you wouldn't get pregnant."

Serena felt a warm flush of pleasure at his words. "I'd like that too. But I think it's too soon—for me anyway. It feels like such a responsibility. As much as I love you, I think I'd die if I got pregnant. I mean how could I face getting an abortion? I'd end up like Shawna."

"That wouldn't happen. I'd stand by you."

"But it would wreck your life, James."

"It wouldn't be a lot of fun, that's for sure." He paused for a moment then asked, "What about birth control?"

"That's what I mean about it being so much responsibility. I mean what if it didn't work?"

"The pill is pretty effective."

"Yeah, I know. But I don't feel ready to start taking pills. It's such a big step. And other stuff—like condoms and sponges—just seems too risky. I mean I know they're pretty safe if you use them right—but what if you made a mistake?" She shook her head slowly. "I don't think I could face the consequences."

"I know what you mean," said James. "It scares me too, if I stop to think about it. I guess, if there

was a way to be totally sure, I'd say let's go for it...but I do understand how it's scary for you. I'm willing to wait, Serena. I don't want to lose you."

Serena hugged James tightly. "I sure love you. And I feel so lucky." She looked down at her clothes. "Look at this. I'm a mess." She hurriedly began buttoning her blouse.

"Looks pretty good to me."

She gave James a playful dig in the ribs and was still straightening her clothes when the flash of headlights caught their attention.

"Who the heck is that?" James asked.

"Oh no," groaned Serena "It's coming this way."

Turn to page 50.

continued from p. 27

This may be the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, thought James. He took a deep breath and reached for Serena's hands. He held them tightly and looked into her eyes. "Are you sure you want this?" he asked.

Serena looked dazed. She pulled her hands from his grasp and struggled to an upright position. "What's wrong, James?"

There's no going back, James thought. We've got to talk about this now. "We were about one minute away from making love. Do you realize that?"

She nodded.

"Serena, it scared me." He felt tears coming to his eyes, but fought them back. "I love you so much and I want you so much, but I want to be sure we're doing what's right. I mean what's right in the long run."

"Oh baby, it's all right," said Serena. She reached up to take his face between her hands. "It's all right. I love you."

James wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "Whew, you have a pretty strong effect on me, girl. What am I gonna do with you?"

"I don't know. I honestly don't. But I'm glad you stopped us, I guess." She shivered. "I still

feel pretty shaky."

"Me too."

"When you stopped, I was just wondering if you had...if you were...you know—prepared."

James gave a short laugh. "Yeah. I'm a regular Boy Scout."

"Let me see."

"Serena, give me a break."

"No, come on. I've never seen one of those things except in health class and then I didn't want to look too closely—you know, with everyone around."

James sighed. He took out his wallet and removed a small package.

"Open it," Serena commanded.

"You open it, if you're so curious."

She tore open the package and gingerly lifted out the condom. "Bizarre," she said unrolling it.

"You're nuts."

"So do these really work?"

"You know the rap as well as I do. They work real well if you use 'em right. They work even better with that foam stuff. I just don't happen to have a can of foam on me."

"Too bad."

"Yeah, you'd probably be spraying it on the windows if I did."

"Here, take this thing."

"Thanks." James tossed the condom and its packet into the front seat. He was trying not to smile.

Serena covered her mouth, trying to keep in the giggles that were threatening to erupt.

"You're a brat, you know that, Serena?"

She nodded and the giggles exploded. Then James joined in. They leaned against each other and laughed until their faces hurt.

"Seriously," said Serena, trying to catch her breath.

"Seriously, Serena, don't talk to me about seriously. Look at yourself." James was laughing again.

"Omigosh, I forgot all about this." Serena began buttoning her blouse and straightening her clothes.

James sighed. "So—seriously—my beautiful crazy one, what are we going to do?"

Serena thought for a moment. "Well," she said, "there are two things that scare me more than anything in the world. One is losing you and the other is...getting pregnant."

"That sums it up pretty much for me, too. Listen, I know we need to talk about this more, but you've got to know two things right off. First, I love you and you're not going to lose me. Second, if you want, I'm willing to wait. Whatever

They leaned against each other and laughed until their faces hurt.

we decide, keep that in mind, okay?"

"Okay." She squeezed his hand. "Who do you suppose that is?" she asked as the headlights of an approaching car flashed into her eyes.

Turn to the next page.

continued from p. 44 or 49

"I don't believe this," said Serena.

"Who is it? Someone we know? Not the cops, I hope?"

"Oh, it's someone we know all right." Serena was frantically tucking in her blouse and trying to smooth back her hair. "It's Christy and David. They've stopped."

"Great," said James, not looking pleased. "Why are they just sitting there? Are they going to invade us or what?"

With that, the door of the other car flew open and Christy burst out. She ran over and tapped on Serena's window. Serena rolled it down. "Hi," she said.

"Am I interrupting something?" Without waiting for an answer Christy went on, "No, I guess not, you guys look decent enough. I saw two heads sticking up so I figured it was all right.... Looks like you've fogged the windows up pretty good though."

"Uh, Christy, actually this isn't a good time...."

Christy, who was not known for her quiet personality chattered on. "Aren't you going to congratulate me? Didn't you notice who was driving? I got my license! I actually passed my driver's test!"

"Congratulations."

"Yeah, congratulations," added James. "Listen, Christy—no offense, but would you mind...uh...do you think...? We're kind of busy here."

Christy's eyes grew big. "Oh. Oops. Was I bad?" She pretended to look meek and small.

"James, you don't have to be rude," chided Serena. "Chris, can I call you tomorrow? I'm sorry, but...."

"Say no more." Christy held up her hand. "I can read the writing on the wall—if you spell it out."

Serena leaned partly out the window to hug her friend. "Thanks—and congratulations, really. Say hi to David."

She sank back into the seat with a sigh. "I don't know, but I don't think I can take much more excitement tonight."

"I'm with you, babe."

"Let's get out of this seat, okay, before someone else comes along."

Driving home, James and Serena laughed about their near miss. "What if they'd come a few minutes earlier?" Serena wondered. "I would've died."

"I'm glad they didn't and you didn't," said

James. "I'd have a hard time explaining it to your folks."

Turn to page 116.

continued from p. 27

It would feel so good, James thought, to just go ahead and not have to hold back any more. He kissed Serena again, slowly and deeply. She pulled him closer and pressed against him. He buried his face in her hair. "I love you," he breathed into her ear. "I want you."

"Yes," she said. I don't care, she was thinking. It's too good.... But I should make sure he's got a condom. How do I say that?

This is going to be a challenge, James thought. Whoever designed these seats definitely did not have love in mind. I've got to get a rubber on too....

The interior of the car suddenly filled with light. "What in the...?" James muttered.

"Oh no. What is it?"

"Headlights." James struggled to sit up.

"Who is it? Can you tell? Is it the police?"

"No, it's not the police. Just keep your head down, maybe they'll go away."

"I don't believe this." Serena squirmed to untangle herself from James and to straighten out her clothes. "This was not a good idea."

"It wasn't just my idea, as I recall," James retorted. He felt thoroughly frustrated. "Whose idea was it to get into the back seat? Anyway, the

car's leaving."

Serena sat up. "We'd better go," she said, feeling her throat constrict and the tears well up in her eyes.

"Okay by me." James got out of the back seat, slamming the door behind him. He leaned against the car, his hands in his pockets. This is stupid, he thought. There's no way we can go on like this.

As he opened the front door and slid into the seat, Serena got out of the back. She stood outside breathing clouds of steam into the frosty air. She shivered and tears streamed down her cheeks.

James started the car. That's fine, she thought. Just go ahead and leave me. I don't need you anyway.

James leaned across the front seat and opened the door. "C'mon, Serena, you'll freeze to death."

She got in, her teeth chattering. "I'd probably be better off."

James swung the car out onto the street. "Cut it out, will you? I'm sorry things turned out like this, Serena, but what do you expect me to do?"

"You could act like you cared about me. A little while ago it was 'Oh baby, baby, I love you, I want you.'"

"I do love you, Serena. You know I do. But I don't think it's fair for you to put it all on me.

You weren't exactly objecting back there."

Serena kept silent the rest of the way home. When they pulled up in front of her house, she jumped out and ran up the front walk.

James sat for a moment wondering if he should go after her. What's the use? he thought. I don't know what to say. She's got a right to be upset, but I have feelings too.

He pulled away slowly. I wish there was someone I could talk to, he thought. Josh is my best friend, but he'd never understand. I can hear him now: "Hey man, if she won't put out, why bother with her? There's lots of other women." A lot of help that would be.

Turn to page 58.

continued from p. 35

"Oh...ah...um...." Shoot, I can't do it, Serena thought. "I don't know. I guess I'm just kind of tired."

"You're sure nothing's wrong?"

"I said it's okay." There was an edge to her voice.

They sat for a while in silence.

"So...what do you want to do?" asked James. He felt helpless. He wanted to hold Serena and tell her everything was all right. But maybe it's not all right, he thought. He looked over at her.

"Don't stare at me, okay?"

"I wasn't staring. I was just looking at you."

"I'm sorry, James. I don't know what's wrong. I guess I'm not in a very good mood."

You can say that again, he thought. "Do you want to just go home?"

"I guess so. I'm not very good company."

"I'll walk you in," said James when they pulled up in front of the house.

"It's okay, don't bother. I do love you." She kissed his cheek and ran up the walk.

I love you too, thought James. He pulled away slowly.

I wish there was someone I could talk to, he thought. Josh is my best friend, but he'd never

understand. I can hear him now: "Hey man, if she won't put out, why bother with her? There's lots of other women." A lot of help that would be.

Turn to page 58.

continued from p. 55 or 57

When James let himself into the apartment, he was surprised to see his dad sitting at the kitchen table. He was eating a cheese sandwich and reading the *Wall Street Journal*. He smiled when he saw James. "Hey, how you doin'?"

"Okay, Pop." Well, not so okay really, he thought.

"You want a sandwich?"

"Uh, no thanks. I'm not very hungry."

Henry Pryce looked at his son questioningly. "Are you sure you're all right?"

I guess I could talk to him about this stuff, James thought. He's been pretty understanding with me before. And even if he doesn't understand, it probably won't hurt anything.

"Uh, well...uh...." This is not happening, he thought. Nothing my old man says is gonna make any difference. I've just got to work this out with Serena.

His dad was looking at him, waiting.

What did James do?

Choice Point 6A
If you think James decided **to talk** to his dad

turn to page 60.

Choice Point 6B
If you think James decided **not to talk** to his dad

turn to page 64.

continued from p. 59

James sat down at the kitchen table opposite his dad. "Actually," he said, taking a deep breath, "actually, Pop, I don't know if I'm all right. Sometimes...." His voice trailed off.

Henry Pryce took a bite of his sandwich. He stared at James thoughtfully. "This is about women, right?"

James looked at his dad with surprise. "How did you know?"

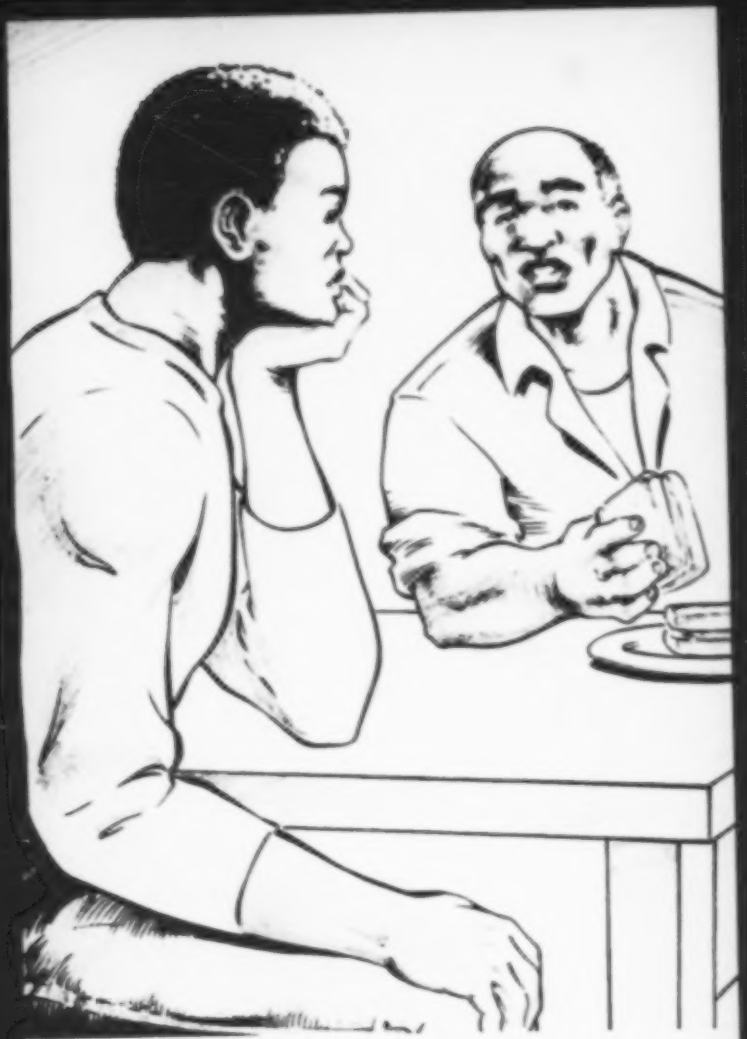
His dad smiled, "Oh, it usually is, son. It usually is."

"The thing is...." James struggled to find the right words. "The thing is, it's different with Serena than it's been before.... Well, you remember a couple years ago when we had that birds and bees kind of talk and you filled me in on all the stuff about birth control and diseases and stuff? Well, that was great, that was just what I needed at the time and it kept me out of trouble."

"Glad I could be of service."

"Yeah. So anyway, all of that really isn't the issue right now. What I need to know is how to act—what to do—or not to do. And it doesn't really seem that anybody can decide those kinds of things except me."

"Let me see if I understand this. Are you say-



"This is about women, right?"

ing you and Serena haven't had sex and you're wondering if you should?"

"You got it."

"Hmm. Have you talked about it with her?"

"Well, not exactly. It seems like lately when we're together we just kind of start...getting involved...and one thing leads to another—and then we have to stop. And then we have a fight and go home. Or sometimes we skip the first part and go straight to the fight."

"Sounds kind of rough. You have a fight tonight?"

"Yeah, sort of."

James' dad sat for a while munching the crusts of his sandwich. "I wonder," he said, "if it's not too personal, how come you two stop before you—ah—go all the way? What's different about this?"

"Well, one thing is Serena. First of all, she's a virgin so it's a big deal to her, although, I don't know—it's hard to tell—sometimes it seems like she doesn't care about that. The other thing is—if she got pregnant—well, I can't imagine anything worse.

"But like you said, you do know about birth control."

"Yeah, but what if it didn't work? I don't know, but it seems like it's different if you really care

about someone. It would be like *our* problem—not just hers." He sighed, "I guess I'm saying I don't think we should go all the way 'cause there's too much at stake. I mean it might be a fantasy, but if Serena and I could still be together a few years from now...."

"Well," said James' dad. "I'm proud of you, son. It sounds to me like you've got it figured out. You don't even need my advice."

"Thanks, but I still don't know what to do. Except I guess we shouldn't let things go so far."

"Sounds reasonable. I think what you need to do now is tell Serena just what you've told me. It sounds to me like what we have here is a failure to communicate."

"Yeah, I guess that could be it." I'll call her tomorrow morning, he thought. The evening's events had left a bad feeling he wanted to clear up as soon as possible. "Hey, is the offer still good on that sandwich? I'm kind of hungry after all."

Turn to page 116.

continued from p. 59

"It's okay, Pop," said James. "I'm just tired. I'm gonna turn in now."

"Okay, son. Good night."

❖ ❖ ❖

James thought about calling Serena during the weekend, but decided not to. She's got my number, too, he thought. She can call me if she has anything to say. Like if she wants to apologize.

During lunch break on Monday, James casually strolled by the spot where he and Serena usually met. She wasn't there. Although he felt a pang of fear, he wasn't about to admit it to himself. He looked around for another place to sit.

"Yo, James." His friend Josh Keller motioned to him.

"Hey, Josh. What's happenin'?"

"Not much."

James nodded to Melissa and Dana who were sitting with Josh. "How you doin'?"

"Hi James. Where's Serena?" Melissa wanted to know.

"Am I her Siamese twin or something?" James demanded with more feeling than he intended.

"She's absent today," Dana chimed in. "At

least she wasn't in first period."

James absorbed this piece of information in silence. He took out his sandwich and bit into it half-heartedly.

"So how was your weekend?" Josh wanted to know. "You play anywhere?"

"Nope. No gigs. It was pretty quiet."

"I saw you play over at Jason Tanner's party a couple weeks ago. You were great," said Dana.

"Thanks."

"Seriously. You're really good. You have a super voice too." She rested her hand lightly on his arm.

James seemed to notice Dana for the first time. She was leaning toward him with obvious interest in her long-lashed, dark eyes.

"Dana," warned Melissa, "don't get any ideas. This one's taken."

Who says? James thought.

After school James had basketball practice. He played even more aggressively than usual, to the delight of the coach and the amazement of his teammates.

Afterwards in the locker room Josh flopped onto the bench next to him. "Something bothering

you, man? You almost ran me down in there."

James looked up from untying his shoe. "Oh. Sorry about that. It wasn't anything personal. I guess I was kind of wound up."

"You should get that wound up when we have our first game. You'll scare the opposition so bad they won't recover all season."

"Yeah, right." James pulled the shoe off and started on the next one.

"So was your girl bad to you or what?"

James just looked at Josh.

"Okay, I know it's none of my business. Just tryin' to help. I've known Serena since we were kids, you know. I just thought maybe I could give you some insight."

Why doesn't he get off this subject? James thought. He may be my best friend, but I don't want to discuss something this personal with him.

"I bet I know what it is. You're not gettin' any from Serena, right?"

"Don't be crude, man."

"Sorry. But I kinda figured that's how it was. Serena's always had high standards." There was a condescending tone in his voice.

"Maybe other people have high standards too."

"Like you, you mean? Like you and Angela Vanessi? Like you and Debi—"

"Knock it off," James interrupted. "This is

different."

"Serena's different, maybe. But you can't tell me you don't have the same…uh…instincts you used to have."

"There's more to life than 'instinct,' man. Maybe you'll figure that out someday."

"Whoa. Look who's gotten so pure all of a sudden. I didn't realize you were so much holier than the rest of us." Josh started to get up.

"Wait a minute. Sit down." James gave his friend's arm a tug. "I'm sorry, man. Some of what you said is right. Not all of it—but it's true I am…well…what you might call frustrated."

"The answer is obvious, man. There are hoards of women out there, just dying to do anything you want."

"Uh huh, sure there are. Name one."

"Easy. Dana West."

"You really think so?"

"Without a doubt. Didn't you notice how she was looking at you at lunch?"

"Well, now that you mention it…. But I don't know. That would be the end of me and Serena for sure."

"Things don't seem so good with you two now. Anyway, maybe if you went out with someone else, it would shock her into…you know."

"Can you get this through your head, man? I

"I didn't realize you were so much holier than the rest of us."

don't know if I want to have sex with Serena at this point in our lives. Somehow it seems too risky. I mean what if she got pregnant?"

"Have you heard of birth control?"

James laughed. "As I recall, I was the one who bought you your first rubber."

"You got me there," said Josh, his face reddening. "So what's the problem?"

"Accidents can still happen, that's what. And an accident like that could totally wreck our lives. Totally. Look at Shawna."

"Yeah, that's too bad about her, but from what I hear they weren't using anything anyway. Besides she could've got an abortion or given the baby up for adoption. And look at Duane—it didn't wreck his life."

"That's harsh, man."

"That's reality."

"You mean to tell me that if Melissa or whoever you're doing it with these days got pregnant, you'd just turn your back?"

"No, of course not. You know me better than that. But if she decided to keep the baby it would be mainly her problem."

James shook his head. "I don't see how you can be so casual about it. How do you think the girl feels? If she feels abortion's wrong or if it's against her religion, then in nine short months

there's another human being in the world that's halfway made up of your genes. It might even look just like you. I wonder how you'd feel about adoption then. You can't run away from something like that."

Josh shrugged. "Life's a gamble. You play, you pay."

"Yeah, well, I'd like to improve my odds, anyway."

"What if the girl was on the pill? Are those odds good enough for you?"

"I don't know. Maybe, if I was sure she'd remember to take them. But Serena's not ready to start taking birth control pills, believe me."

"I wasn't thinking of Serena."

"Oh?"

"Dana's on the pill."

"How would you know?"

"She and Melissa went to the clinic together."

"Well, I'll keep that in mind," James said. Why did I say that? he thought. What do I care? "Hey, we better hit the showers." He jumped up. "We're the only ones left in here. The janitor's gonna turn off the lights if we don't get a move on."

As James headed home, he thought about

phoning Serena. It was hard to stay upset with her, especially if she was really sick. He was starting to worry a little.

When he got home, the phone was ringing. Maybe it's Serena, he thought, making a dash for it and nearly tripping over the coffee table.

"Hello, James?"

"Yeah."

"Hi, I didn't know if you'd be home yet."

"Who's this?"

There was a giggle. "It's me, Dana. I hope it's okay for me to call you."

"Sure."

"Well, what I was wondering…I mean I know you're supposed to be going with Serena and all that, but…um…I was wondering if you go out with other people?"

"Uh…." Whoa, thought James. Time to think fast. "Well, I guess that depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On the other people. Who'd you have in mind?"

There were more giggles. "Mmm, well, me, actually."

James was flattered. Dana was a beautiful girl, no doubt about it. Why not? he thought. It would be a relief to just go out and have a good time and not have to deal with emotional hassles. Besides,

the conversation with Josh was still fresh in his memory.

"So what were you thinking of?" he asked.

"Well, there's this party I'm invited to over in Holiday Hills on Friday. It would be cool if you could go."

"That sounds interesting."

"Is that a yes?"

"Uh, yeah sure, why not?"

"Oh, that's great," she said. "I hope Serena won't be too jealous."

Me too, thought James. "Listen Dana, I gotta go. I'll see you later, okay?"

You jerk, James thought as he hung up the phone. What did you do that for? What is Serena going to think? It'll probably be the end of your relationship. Is that what you want?

James brought his fist down hard on the table making the lamp that rested on it jump. So call her back and tell her you screwed up, he suggested to himself. The reasonable thing is to try to work this out with Serena first.

On one hand, Serena's being such a pain. On the other other hand, you know you still love her.

But the idea of calling Dana back to cancel their date was almost too painful to think about.

What did James do?

Choice Point 7A

If you think James decided **to go ahead with his date** with Dana

turn to page 74.

Choice Point 7B

If you think James decided **to break the date** with Dana

turn to page 81.

continued from p. 73

It was with mixed emotions that James drove to pick up Dana for their date on Friday night. Dana was good-looking and she clearly liked him a lot. The party they were going to promised to be interesting. But he still felt badly about the situation with Serena. She'd come back to school toward the end of the week, still recovering from an attack of the flu. They'd spoken a little, casually and politely, but there was something missing between them. James had suggested that they get together the following Sunday to talk about what they were going to do. Serena had agreed.

Dana, as James had expected, looked sexy and terrific. She greeted him with a hug and stayed close to him all evening, often with a possessive hand on his arm or knee. She's not hard to be with anyway, James thought, as Dana chattered happily with him and her other friends. Looking around, he didn't see anyone he knew very well. The band was pretty good and the food outrageous, he had to admit, but something was definitely missing.

Dana led James onto the dance floor for a slow dance. She slipped her arms around his neck. "You're awfully quiet tonight, you know."

"Oh," he said. "Sorry, I guess I'm not used

to…you know…all of this." He gestured at the room.

"Mmm. I see. I thought maybe it was something else."

James had a sinking feeling that the conversation was going to get too personal for comfort. He waited.

"Like, maybe you were thinking about your girlfriend? Or should I say your former girlfriend?"

James felt uncomfortably hot. His palms were getting sweaty. "Uh, no, not really."

"Well," said Dana, "just in case you were, I want you to know you should tell me now. 'Cause I don't want to mess around, if you know what I mean." She drew back so that she could look directly into his eyes. "I'm starting to like you a whole lot. So I'd appreciate it if you were up front with me. Just what is your story with Serena anyway?"

There goes my idea about having a good time with no emotional involvement, James thought. He sighed. "I don't know, Dana, to tell you the truth. I actually don't know."

James took Dana home shortly after that. They didn't talk much during the drive. When they arrived at Dana's house, James walked her to the door. She turned and looked up at him, her finger

toying with the lapels of his jacket. "So what do you think, chance or no?"

"Maybe we should cool it for right now, Dana. I don't know if I'm coming or going. I'm sorry if I made you think there was more to it."

"Just keep me informed, okay?"

"Will do. Thanks." James kissed her briefly.

He drove away with a feeling of relief.

On Sunday, James met Serena at her house. She greeted him coolly. They went into the family room and closed the door so that they could talk in private. James felt an impulse to put his arms around Serena, but something in her manner made him hold back. They sat down.

"So," she said. "Been to any good parties lately?"

Busted already, James thought dismally. I don't even get a chance to explain. "What'd you hear? Who told you?"

"I heard what Dana told Melissa and Melissa told Tracy. Tracy thought I knew already. I was probably the only one in the world that didn't know. So could you at least do me the honor of telling me in your own words? So I don't have to rely on the grapevine?"

"Am I on trial or something?" Cut it, man, he told himself. Stop being so defensive. "Okay, I'm sorry. I'll tell you. It's no big deal."

Yeah, right, her look said.

"Dana asked me to go to this party with her and I went. That's all. Nothing happened. We ate some food, danced a few times, I took her home. I went home. I went to bed. I thought about you."

Serena was glaring at him with the angriest look he'd ever seen. She could barely speak. "You…you …you've got a lot of nerve. Couldn't you even wait until after we talked? Couldn't you even give me a chance?"

"But it's not like that, Serena. It's not like there's any competition. I…I just thought it would be good to go out and not have any hassles. We don't seem to talk anymore, we just fight. Why can't we try to talk reasonably about this stuff?"

"Seems like going out with someone else is a funny way to show you want to talk to me."

He reached for her hand. "C'mon, babe—"

"Don't 'babe' me." She pulled away and turned her back. "You'd better go."

"Okay. But just one thing. You've got a right to be mad, Serena. I think I screwed up by not trying to work things through with you before this. And I'm sorry. But you're not helping any by keeping on with the same old stuff."

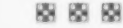
"Going out with someone else is a funny way to show you want to talk to me."

She still hadn't turned to face him.

"I'm leaving it up to you then." His voice was low and carefully controlled. "So I'd suggest you think about it carefully. Okay, Serena?"

She nodded slightly.

He turned and went out of the house.



Serena got up at last and went into the bathroom. She washed her face in cool water and stared into the mirror at her bloodshot eyes. You are a mess, that's for sure, she thought. You've got to pull yourself together.

Serena's mother took her aside after dinner. "You look terrible, honey," she said. "Did your talk with James go badly?"

"There actually wasn't much of a talk, Mom. I was too mad. I still am."

"You've certainly got a right to your feelings, Serena. But I've found it usually doesn't help our communication if we let our emotions completely take over. When you feel up to it, I think you and James should try to talk things out."

"Yeah, well, thanks Mom. I'll think about it."

Serena didn't sleep much that night as she tried to sort through her feelings of anger, hurt, frustration and confusion. I love him, she thought.

That's the bottom line. That's why I've got to try to save the relationship. I guess he wants to too. At least, that's what he said.

But then she thought about Dana. She thought about James and Dana kissing. She thought about them making love. Even if they didn't, she thought, they probably would if they got the chance. That's something he can get from her that he's not getting from me right now. I can't compete in that department. What's the point in trying? We should just break up and get it over with. What's the use of kidding myself anymore?

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 8A
If you think Serena decided **to break up** with James
turn to page 99.

Choice Point 8B
If you think Serena decided **to try to talk** with James
turn to page 101.

continued from p. 73

Just do it man, James told himself. Don't even think, just do it. He reached for the telephone.

"Listen, Dana, I messed up. I can't go Friday after all. I'm sorry."

There was an agonizing silence. "Oh. Well, okay."

James breathed a sigh of relief. "Thanks for being so understanding."

"You're welcome, but I'm not sure I really do understand. Does this mean no for just Friday or no forever?"

I guess I don't get off so easy after all, James thought. "Well, let's say it's no on any heavy stuff. I have to work things through with Serena. I was kind of running away from some stuff I need to deal with."

"Oh. I guess I wish you'd thought of that before. I feel like a jerk."

"Hey, you're not a jerk. You've been really cool. I'm sorry I screwed up. Really…I…uh… I better go now."

"Well, I don't know if I should wish you luck or not."

"Yeah. Well, we'll see. Catch you later."

Hey, I'm on a roll, James thought. I might as well keep on apologizing. He dialed Serena's

number.

A muffled voice answered.

"Rena? Is that you?"

"It's be, Jabes. I hab a code or flu or subthig."

"You sound awful."

"Thag you."

"Can you talk? You sound like you're gonna die or something."

"I cad tog a liddul. Bud I hab a spliddig headegg."

"I'm sorry you're sick, babe. When did you come down with it?"

"Well, on Sadurday I wed dowd to school to pragtice ad the gyb ad I kebt feelig worse ad worse ad fidaly the coach sed be hobe."

"Can I come over? I think we need to talk. I've been feeling real bad about the other night."

"Oh Jabes, be too. But you bedder stay away for dow, 'cause I mide be codtagious."

They talked a little more and James promised to check back the next day. He whistled as he took out the trash and put that night's dinner in the microwave to defrost. He even smiled while he did his homework.

Serena felt so much better after talking to James that she decided to wash her hair. The next day her head had cleared and the day after that she felt almost normal.

That day, James came over after school. "Wow, you look good," he said. "Can I touch you?"

Serena flung herself against him and hugged him tightly. "I missed you so much. I feel like such a stupid idiot."

"That makes two of us," James said. "I've realized how much you mean to me. We've got to try to make this work."

"It's so good to hear you say that. I've been having horrible fantasies that you wouldn't love me anymore. That you'd find somebody else that wasn't so moody or that was... you know...more experienced."

"Serena, will you get those ideas out of your head? We've got to talk about this stuff instead of trying to guess what the other person's thinking."

"I know. How about if we make some hot chocolate and then sit down to talk?"

A few minutes later they carried their hot drinks into the family room.

"Okay," James said. "Who gets to go first?"

"You," said Serena, with a grin.

"Thanks." He took a sip of his hot chocolate. "Well, let's see. I've been thinking a lot about us and planning what to say to you, but it seems to have sort of evaporated now."

"I know what you mean. It's funny how you

can feel so close to someone, but then when you have to talk about the real, real personal stuff, it's like you don't even know them."

"Yeah. Well, here goes. The way I see it there are two main things we need to talk about. One is about what we want in the future—like if we want to be together and what we're gonna do about school, work and so on. The other is about our relationship right now—what we're going to do about...um...when things start to get heavy...you know...." He stared into his hot chocolate.

"The s-word, you mean?"

James looked up with a quick grin. "Yeah, the old s-word." He shook his head. "I don't know, Serena, but it's kind of scary to even think about sex with you—not that I don't—I mean I do—but—"

"I'm that frightening, am I?"

"C'mon, Serena, you know that's not what I mean. It's just the opposite. I would *really* like to make love with you. I hope you feel the same way. But I don't know if we should start now. I mean sometimes it seems like we're getting kind of close, and then somehow we stop, and then a lot of times we have a fight. I feel like I'm going nuts sometimes."

"Me too." Serena sipped her hot chocolate

thoughtfully. "You know, I wasn't too sure how you felt. 'Cause sometimes you seem kind of…um…kind of restrained and then other times it seems pretty…uh…intense. So it's good to know you're just as confused as I am."

"Yeah, it's a great feeling."

"But it helps to talk. I feel better already even if we haven't solved anything."

"Me too." He reached for her hand and brought it to his lips. "You're something else, you know that?"

"So are you."

"So…well, the big problem still remains." He raised his voice dramatically: "Serena Williams and James Pryce—will they or won't they? That is the question."

Serena laughed. "I think they might—but not yet." She looked at James seriously. "Is that okay with you?"

James nodded. "Yeah, it's okay. In some ways it's a relief. 'Cause we'd have to worry about birth control and your parents finding out…. And what if you got pregnant?"

"I know. That's something I don't see how I could face. And can you imagine my dad? I think I'd rather die."

"So do you think we should make some kind of agreement about all this?" Serena asked. "So

we don't get into the same kind of situations we've been in before, so we know when to stop before it gets too complicated. I mean we can still hug and kiss, can't we?"

"Come on over here and find out."

Serena moved closer. After a while she said, "Yes, I guess we can."

"Indeed we can," agreed James. "We can do that pretty well."

"Let's say, for now anyway, that we just leave it at that—hugging and kissing. And if someone feels like doing something else—like if one of us starts to get wandering hands—then we'll stop and do something else."

"Like play tiddly-winks?"

"Uh huh. Or golf or tennis. No, seriously, something like go for a walk or talk about something—just change the subject. You know what I mean."

"Yeah. And another thing."

"What's that?"

"We better stay out of certain places—like the back seat."

"You're right." She sighed. "It'll be great when we can do what we want."

"So let's talk about that. Let's see if we can make a future for ourselves."

"That sounds wonderful. You want some more

"We can still hug and kiss, can't we?"

hot chocolate?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, I do. I'm gonna make some. Don't go away."

Turn to the next page.

continued from p. 41 or 88

"The first thing we need," said James, "is some paper. And a pencil or something to write with."

"Coming up." Serena rummaged through the school supplies in her backpack. Then she and James stretched out on the rug in the family room to make their lists. "We did something like this in health class," said Serena. "It was kinda neat."

"So what categories are we gonna have?" James asked.

"Well, there's 'school,' 'career,' 'family,' 'home' ...."

"Hey, what about 'love life'?

"'Love life'? What's that?"

"Very funny. Okay then, 'romance'? I mean our relationship has to be on here someplace, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I suppose. Okay, let's call that category 'partner,' okay?"

"Okay. Anything else?"

"What about something like 'friends' or 'social life'?"

"Okay. Let's say 'friends-slash-social life' and then maybe we should add 'other.'"

"Other?"

"In case we think of other things that are important."

"Okay. So we're making lists of what we want in one year, two years, five years and what else?"

"How about ten years and fifty years?"

"Fifty years? You can't plan for fifty years from now."

"Well, twenty-five then. Just put down how you'd like it to be."

"Sounds good. So we have...um...seven categories and five time periods, right?"

"Right. So let's write."

Serena and James scribbled furiously for almost an hour. James finished first and occupied himself by trying to get a look at Serena's list.

She swatted at him. "Get away from me."

"C'mon, just a little peek?"

"Go away. I'm almost done. Beat it."

When Serena finished she waved her papers in the air. "Ta dah!"

"Let's see."

"Slow down there, big fella. Let's see yours."

They exchanged lists. James' list was scrawled over several sheets of paper. It read:

One year:

College - state university? (could still see Serena on weekends)
Career - study business (pre-law?)
Family - none (I hope!)
Home - dorm?
Partner - S.
Friends/social life - Serena & her friends, Josh, new friends at college?
Other - keep playing guitar, learn piano?

Two years:

School - same? (but what if Serena goes to someplace far away?)
Career - same
Family - same
Home - same
Partner - same
Friends, etc. - S. & new friends
Other - same

Five:

School - graduate school—business or law
Career - same
Family - same
Home - apartment? (near college)
Partner - you know who
Friends, etc. - who knows ?
Other - music; travel in summer with S.—Europe?

Ten:

School - no more!
Career - lawyer or up and coming young exec.
Family - time to settle down? start kids now or in a couple of years
Home - nice house w/ S.
Partner - three guesses

Friends - people we live near or work with
Other - still playing music and composing; build recording studio? Own a Porsche

Twenty-five years (I'll be 42—same as my dad):

Career - Well established, lots of $
Family - two (?) kids
Home - nice house
Partner - what was her name again?
Friends - same as above
Other - success as composer

Serena's list was neatly printed on two pages:

One year from now:
- School - graduate from Rosemont, with honors
- Career - guess I'll need to decide. Maybe sports medicine or something to do with art and design
- Family - just the one I'm in now!
- Home - ditto
- Partner - James
- Friends/social life - Tracy, Christy & other friends from school
- Other - gymnastics—state finals?

Two years:
- School - College (where would probably depend on James, I'd like to be close enough to see each other on weekends—maybe State U?)
- Career - It's getting closer—help!
- Family - Same as now
- Home - maybe dorm?
- Partner - J.
- Friends/social life - New friends, but I hope I can keep the old ones too!
- Other - Keep up with gymnastics—it would be good to go to a school where I can do this.

Five years:
- School - graduate from college—go on to medical school?
- Career - by now I guess I've figured it out—either design and graphics or sports medicine.
- Family - still too soon to start one!

Home - ? an apartment? with??
Partner - see above
Friends/social life - same as above
Other - still active physically—gymnastics or dancing; take art courses; travel? (Europe w/James would be nice—hint, hint)

Ten years:
School - med school???
Career - sports medicine or design/graphics?
Family -depends on career, who I'm with, etc. In my fantasy, James and I are married and planning to start a family soon.
Home - A nice house in a quiet neighborhood. Space for a garden.
Partner - James I hope.
Friends/social life - new friends from work or where we live; go to concerts, plays and galleries.

Twenty-five years:
At least I should be out of school
Career - Whatever it is, I want to be successful at it and combine it with my family life.
Family - husband, two kids (two boys or one boy/one girl), dog, cat, birds.
Home - nice house, big yard, (pool?), maybe my parents could live near us?
Partner - same as above
Friends/social life - same as above
Other - same as above; travel during summers? I'd also like to do something that helps other people, like my mom does.

Serena finished reading first. She watched James until he finished. "So. What do you think?"

"It's pretty far out. They go together pretty well, I think."

"Uh huh.... I did notice one thing though."

"What's that?"

"Well...on your 'ten year' list—where you say 'settle down' it's not exactly clear what you mean...."

"C'mon, you know."

"Is it the m-word, James?" There was a twinkle in her eye, but she also had his wrist in an iron grip.

"Hey, Serena, I'm kind of young to go around talking about that kind of stuff." He laughed and tried to free himself from her grasp.

"What stuff? C'mon, I dare you to say it."

"Owww. Okay, okay. Turn me loose. I'll say it."

She released his arm.

"Okay. M-m-marriage. There, I said it."

"Go on."

"What do you mean 'go on'?"

"You big chicken. What about marriage?"

"Okay, you win. I hope we can get married someday, Serena. I really do. But it's so far off that it's sort of hard to imagine. We have a lot of stuff to do first. But it would be fantastic. I can't

see loving anyone as much as I love you."

"You're not just saying that 'cause I tortured you?"

"You are pretty persuasive, I must admit." He pulled her against him and pressed his mouth against her hair. "But I said it because I meant it."

She stroked his arm thoughtfully. "It is a long way off. The future doesn't seem real."

"It isn't babe, not till we build it. But today is real, every today is real. That's why we have to make the best of every day."

"And why we have to talk to each other." She picked up their lists and shuffled the pages. "Let's save these and check them in a few months to see how we're moving toward our goals or if they've changed."

"Good plan."

The door opened then and Serena's father stuck his head in. "Just wondered what you two were up to," he said.

"Hi, Mr. Williams."

"Hi, Dad." Good old Dad, thought Serena, always checking up. Some things never change.

"Doing your homework I see?"

"Yeah, you could say that," Serena said starting to laugh. She waved the papers under James' nose.

James laughed too. "Yes sir, just doin' our homework."

Crazy kids, Donald Williams thought, shaking his head. He smiled as he gently closed the door.

THE END

continued from p. 80

During the following week Serena tried to avoid James. He approached her at lunch a couple of times, but she just said a quick hello and went off to the restroom or the library where she wouldn't have to see him.

"You're gonna have to say something," Tracy urged. "It's not fair to either one of you to keep things hanging like this."

"I know. It just hurts so much. I feel sort of paralyzed. I don't ever want to be in love again." She burst into tears. Tracy patted her arm helplessly.

Later on Serena decided to write James a note. She just couldn't bring herself to talk to him face to face.

"I do love you," she wrote, "but it hurts too much. I don't feel that I can give you what you need. Maybe later on we can still be friends." She rode her bike to James' apartment building and slipped the note through the slightly open window of his car. She rode home feeling the sting of the cold wind on her tear-stained cheeks.

When James found the note, he read it quickly then crumpled it in his fist and threw it into a nearby trash can. "If that's the way she wants it," he muttered, "that's the way she'll get it." He

pushed down his feelings of hurt and sadness, letting only the anger flow through. "I hope you're satisfied, Serena. I hope you have a real Merry Christmas."

THE END

continued from p. 80

At lunch time on Monday, Serena went to the spot where she and James usually met. She leaned against the wall and looked around. She saw Dana talking with Melissa and surrounded by boys as usual. At least James isn't one of them, she thought.

"Hey there."

"You scared me!" She couldn't hold back a smile.

"*You* scared *me*. I thought you wouldn't show. I hope you have good news," James said.

"I don't know. Something keeps telling me we should break up, but I just can't face it. Anyway my mom said she thought we should talk."

"Well, I think your mom's right. We haven't had a real heart-to-heart type talk about us—about what we want from each other and from our lives and all that."

"Yeah, but I still don't think that's going to solve our basic problem."

"What's that?"

She felt her face grow hot. "You know, James."

"I don't know, Serena. How can I know if you won't tell me?"

"Some things are embarrassing to talk about. But anyway all the talking in the world isn't going

to change the fact that I'm a virgin and you're not."

"So what?"

"Well, sooner or later you're gonna get tired of me and want to be with someone with experience—like Dana. Unless I...uh...you know... and I'm not ready for that."

"Serena, you're crazy. I love you, but you're crazy."

"Maybe." She felt the tears starting to form.

"We've got to—" James was interrupted by the bell signaling the end of lunch.

Serena turned away. "I've got to go. I've got a test in chemistry."

"Okay, but let's talk about this, okay? 'Cause I want to make sure you understand me."

Serena nodded and left quickly. Her chemistry test wasn't made any easier by the tears that occasionally splashed onto the words and numbers as she wrote them.

That afternoon after gymnastics practice Christy called her. "You want to go Christmas shopping? I can get the car."

"But can you drive?"

"Ha, ha. Please come with me, Serena—just for a couple hours. We haven't done anything together for ages."

"I noticed you've been busy."

"You've been pretty busy yourself. So can you go, Rena?"

"I guess. I don't have much homework. When do you want to go?"

"I was thinking after dinner. About 7:00?"

"Okay. I'll have to check, but it's prob'ly okay. I'll call you back if it isn't."

"This is great," said Serena, clambering into the front seat of Christy's parents' car. "Now you can drive me around for a change. To the mall, Jeeves, and make it snappy."

"Right on," said Christy. She accelerated energetically away from the curb.

"Take it easy."

"Humph. You're so stuffy," Christy huffed, but she did slow down a bit.

At the mall they circled the parking lot in search of a space. "I feel like a vulture or something waiting to swoop down on some poor innocent animal," said Christy.

"There's your dinner."

"Far out." Christy swung into a space before the other circling cars could notice it.

Serena laughed as they walked into the mall. "You always cheer me up, Chris. I'm so glad you

asked me to come."

Christy looked closely at Serena. "Is something wrong? Has James been mean to you? Silly me for not noticing. Now that I look at you, you don't look so good."

"Thanks."

"Your eyes are all puffy. Does my buddy have the blues?" She put her arm around Serena's shoulder.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"So what's the matter? You tell Auntie Christy all about it."

"You didn't hear, obviously."

"Obviously. Hear what? You didn't break up did you?"

"No, not yet anyway."

"Yikes, this is serious. What happened?"

"James went out with Dana West."

"Dana West? Dana West? Humph, that figures."

"What do you mean?"

"I hear she's working her way through the senior guys."

"Christy, that's disgusting. People who say that are probably just jealous. Actually I think she's pretty nice. And she is gorgeous, you must admit."

"I suppose—if you like long shapely legs

better than short stubby ones." (She looked down at her own.) "Or if you like big brown eyes with naturally thick long eyelashes better than little squinty ones." She wrinkled up her face at Serena who was laughing so hard she had to stop walking. She leaned against a counter piled with sweaters.

"Stop it, Chris, I mean it. I can't take anymore," she moaned.

"So what on earth got into James? Did you guys have a fight?"

"Yeah, I guess. We just haven't been getting along real well."

"What's the problem anyway? S'cuse me, could you move your hand off that sweater? What do you think about this for my mom?"

"That would be a good color for her."

"So what about you and James? How come you two have been fighting? You've always been such lovebirds."

"Well, it's about, you know, sex."

"What about it? You want to, he doesn't, right? Just kidding, don't look so shocked."

"Actually, I don't know what he wants. He says it's not so important, but he acts like it's pretty important sometimes."

"But it's not important to you?"

"Oh, yes, it's super important. But I think I

want to wait before we...you know...go all the way."

"Do you mind if we go over to the kids' department?" Christy asked. "I've got to get something for my brother. So you've discussed all this with James, I assume?"

"No, we haven't exactly discussed it. I don't know, it's so embarrassing and besides even if we discuss it, I know it'll still come around to the same old thing."

"How can you know that? I think James really loves you. He's gonna respect your feelings. That's what love's about."

"Yeah, but what about his feelings?"

"Well, if you haven't really talked, how do you know what they are?"

"Call it an educated guess. Anyway I feel so uncool sometimes, like I don't know what's going on. But I can't help it, I just don't feel ready."

"Well, I think it's cool that you don't want to do something just 'cause you think other people are doing it. Anyway I know lots of people that are still virgins."

"Oh yeah? Name three."

"Easy. Michelle, David, and me."

"You don't count."

"Besides I don't know how long that will last."

"What?"

"I think it's cool that you don't want to do something just 'cause you think other people are doing it."

"Well, I'll tell you more about it later. Anyway I'm thinking about going to the family planning clinic soon."

"Well, at least that part's a good idea. But are you sure you're ready? You're not letting David pressure you or anything?"

"I guess I'm as sure as I'm gonna get. I'll fill you in on the gory details later. Look at these will you?" Christy exclaimed as they entered the toy department. "'Masters of Gloom,' 'Dragons of Despair,' 'Monsters of Madness.' Do you believe kids' toys these days? Robbie's gonna love 'em."

"You still need to name another virgin. In fact, two more if you and David are both gonna be disqualified so soon."

"Uh, okay. How about Tracy? I know she had sex with Vincent, but that was last year and she swears she's not gonna do it again until she's thirty."

"Sorry."

"Okay, then there's Tanisha Scott...and Harrison Sloan...let me see...."

"Wait a minute. How do you know about Harrison?"

"Well, I can't exactly tell you 'cause it's privileged information from Melissa."

"But Melissa used to go out with him."

"Exactly. Oh, and you know who else? I just thought of this—you won't believe it."

"Enlighten me, please."

"Robin Tyler." She stood back to watch the effect.

"No, no way. I don't believe that. She's gone out with practically the whole football team. She's going steady with Mark DeVries—you know about him. No way is she a virgin."

"This proves my point. There's probably a whole bunch of us out there that we don't even know about. I just can't decide between the 'Hellhounds of Horror' and the 'Dragons of Despair.' What do you think?"

"I sort of like the 'Ghouls from Below' actually."

"Yeah, they're cute too. Look at their little buggy eyes. Good idea, we'll get the ghouls."

"What makes you think Robin Tyler's a virgin? Honestly Christy, that's the most unbelievable thing you've ever come up with."

"Well, I believe it. I'll tell you what—ask Josh, he'll tell *you* the truth."

"But Josh went out with her too."

"That's what I mean. She's been out with tons of guys so everybody thinks she's fast, but she hasn't done it with any of 'em. But, the thing is, none of them will admit it 'cause it would wreck

their reputations. It's sort of a conspiracy."

"I just can't believe it."

"Ask, you'll see. Hey, don't you want to buy anything? Do you have something for James?"

"No, not yet. I don't know if we'll still be together. I mean I don't really want to split up, but I just can't go on like this."

"Don't be morbid. C'mon let's look in the men's department."

"Okay. I've got to get something for my dad anyway."

"What'd you get for your mom?"

"I've been working on it in art class. It's a plaster cast of her favorite daughter's face."

"That's cool—did you have to put stuff all over your face to make it?"

"Yeah, it was weird, but it's turning out pretty neat. Ooo, check out this sweater."

"That's beautiful. Feel how soft it is. Serena this would look terrific on James."

"Christy, cut it out."

"Sorry, I meant on your dad."

"Sure you did. I can see my dad in blue and pink. My dad is beige, navy, gray, and maybe—just maybe—burgundy."

"Burgundy's nice. Check those shelves out over there."

Serena and Christy returned with their arms

full of packages. Christy helped Serena carry hers into the house.

"I'd better get back," Christy said. "You take care." She hugged Serena tightly.

"Thanks, Chris." She hugged her friend back. "It helped a lot to talk to you."

The next day Serena waited for James at lunch. She'd decided what she was going to tell him.

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 9A

If you think Serena decided **to break up** with James

turn to page 112.

Choice 9B

If you think Serena decided **to have a talk** with James

turn to page 114.

continued from p. 111

Serena watched miserably as James approached. His smile faded as he noticed her expression.

"What's the matter?" he asked softly. He felt as though an ice cold hand was squeezing his insides. Please, he thought, please don't let her say it.

"I'm sorry. I just don't think we can keep seeing each other. It's too painful."

"Serena, please don't say that. I'm so sorry for what I did. If there was anyway to go back and change the past I would, believe me. Can't you give me, give us, another chance?"

"It's not just 'cause of Dana, James. I just don't think I should be with anybody right now. It's too painful. I mean I've got so many pressures on me already.... This has become just one more pressure."

"Serena, can't we talk this out? I don't mean to be pressuring you. I want to help make you happy. You make me so happy."

"I just can't see it, James. I'm sorry." She turned away.

He caught her by the shoulder and made her face him. "One more chance, that's all I'm asking."

"I don't think so. I've got to go." She shrugged off his hand.

He watched her go. Wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, he turned and strode rapidly in the opposite direction.

THE END

continued from p. 111

Serena watched nervously as James approached.

"Hi," he said softly.

"Hi."

"So how are you?"

"Okay, I guess. You?"

"Okay...sort of.... Well, actually not very okay."

"What's goin' on?"

"Well, I've been thinking a lot. And going back and forth and around in circles. I don't know what to do, but I guess maybe we should have that heart-to-heart talk, after all."

"All right!" James broke into a smile. "You have no idea what I've been going through. I thought for sure you were gonna cut me loose."

"It crossed my mind. But I guess I love you too much to give up so easily. I figured we better try everything we can to keep us together."

"That's music to my ears, girl." James pulled her into a bear hug. "Hey, how about some lunch?"

"I didn't bring any. I was too nervous to make anything. I guess we could still get something in the cafeteria."

"No need for that. This is your lucky day. Sit

down and feast your eyes on this." He removed a crumpled paper bag from his backpack. Reaching inside, he produced a large foil-wrapped package. He opened it. "Roast beef sandwiches. My dad made this humongous roast last night—'cause his girlfriend came over—so we get the fringe benefits."

"They're beautiful. I just realized I'm starving."

"I've got some apple juice in here somewhere too."

"You're wonderful."

"You're the wonderful one," he said, taking her hand and looking at her seriously. "Don't you forget it."

Turn to the next page.

continued from p. 52, 63 or 115

Christmas was only three days off.

"Hand me that glass bird, will you, James? Thanks."

Serena climbed up another step on the ladder and gently placed the ornament on one of the tree's topmost branches. "Do you think it needs anything else up here?"

"Looks pretty good. Besides we're almost out of ornaments anyway."

Serena climbed down and stepped back to view their handiwork. "It's really nice. Your dad's gonna be blown away when he gets home."

"Yeah, for almost a week he's been saying, 'Let's get the tree. Let's get some Christmas spirit around here.' Then someone calls from the office and he runs out again."

"Poor guy. Some vacation he's having."

"Yeah. Well, he promised to take the next three days off. Charlene's coming home from college tomorrow so that should keep him home anyway."

"It'll be super to see Charlene. I've missed her."

"Can't say as I have. Just kidding," he added, noticing her look. "Let's get these boxes put back

in the closet before the old man comes back."

When the boxes were safely stored and the room neat, Serena and James stood back and gazed at the Christmas tree. "Let's turn out all the lights," Serena suggested.

The sparkling light from the tree bathed the room in a magical glow. "I love it," Serena exclaimed clapping her hands. "It's like fairyland. It makes me feel like a little kid."

"You look kind of like a little kid," James said kissing the tip of her nose.

"I feel so much better now than a few weeks ago. It's like a weight's been lifted off me."

"I know what you mean. I can't believe we went so long without talking about the real important things."

"I think that was mostly my fault. I was such a chicken when it came to talking about my feelings about sex and stuff like that."

"I have to take equal responsibility—I was pretty good at avoiding the heavy duty issues myself."

"Anyway, we got through that, so now we get to have our first Christmas together."

"The first of many, I hope," James said.

"Me too." Serena wrapped her arms tightly around James' neck and kissed him hard.

There was the sound of a key turning in the

Serena wrapped her arms tightly around James' neck and kissed him hard.

front door's lock. "Quick, let's hide so we can see the expression on his face." Serena pushed James toward the kitchen and she crouched behind the sofa.

Henry Pryce stood in the doorway and stared. "Those kids," he said. He brushed at his eyes.

"Surprise," yelled Serena.

"Ho, ho, ho," added James, as his father enfolded both of them in a fierce embrace.

"You kids are too much," he said. "You're great."

"We know!" They laughed and hugged some more.

THE END

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About the Author

Christine DeVault, an educational writer and former secondary school teacher, has authored or coauthored numerous middle school, high school and college texts, including six interactive books for Network Publications. With her husband Bryan Strong she is coauthor of *The Marriage and Family Experience*, a leading college textbook.

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to push them apart. Their story directly
volves you because you make decisions
them.

"I've been missing you so much," said Serena.

"Me too." James leaned toward her.

They kissed for a moment and then Serena pu
away. She looked seriously at James. "I love you,"
said.

"I love you too, babe. Is something wrong?"

Well, she thought, this is it. Do or die. Open
mouth and talk, girl.

What did Serena do?

Choice Point 5A

If you think Serena decided to talk to James abou
and their relationship, turn to page 36.

Choice Point 5B

If you think Serena decided not to talk to James, tu
page 56.

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